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AUTHOR Ravitch, Diane S.
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ABSTRACT

This document contrasts the concept of multiculturalism as it appears in the proposed New York State curriculum guide, "A Curriculum of Inclusion," and as it appears in the California State history/social sciences curriculum. California uses the following approaches to reflect the multiracial, multicultural nature of American society: (1) expanding the study of world history to include the development of non-Western civilizations; (2) encouraging the use of the literature and art of diverse cultures; (3) recognizing the central role of Blacks in reshaping American political institutions; (4) recognizing the importance of ethnic groups in building the nation; (5) emphasizing civic values, democratic behaviors, and human rights; and (6) balancing the concept of pluralism with the sense of unity. However, the New York proposal disparages common elements in American society in the following ways: (1) overstating the inherent racism of the existing curriculum; (2) focusing only on African American, Asian American, Native American, and Latino/Puerto Rican perspectives; (3) treating Whites and Western culture with contempt; (4) asserting that curricular bias is responsible for the poor academic achievement of minority group students; (5) basing the need for revision on questionable demographic trends and political pressure; (6) endorsing the notion of collective, historical guilt; and (7) encouraging racial chauvinism and racial superiority. (FMW)

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Multiculturalism in the Curriculum

By Diane S. Ravitch

In mid-November, the State Department of Education held a working session to discuss the implementation of "A Curriculum of Inclusion." I spoke as one of four consultants. Six members of the Task Force were present, as were Commissioner Sobol and two members of the Board of Regents. I intend to tell you the same things that I told them.

Soon after Thomas Sobol was appointed Commissioner of Education, he appointed a Task Force on Minorities: Equity and Excellence. It was chaired by Hazel Dukes, chair of the New York State NAACP. The task force was composed of representatives of black, Latino, Asian, and American Indian minorities.

Among other things, the task force was charged with reviewing the state curriculum. The task force--and its consultants--reviewed the teacher guides that the state prepares in every subject area. They did not review textbooks or other materials read by students. New York State does not adopt textbooks; teachers and districts are free to use any textbook they choose. In fact, the only way that the state knows whether the districts are paying any attention to its curriculum guides is by the results of the Regents' Examinations, which students take at the end of high school.

In July 1989, the Task Force's report on the state curriculum was submitted to the Board of Regents for discussion. It is now being reviewed by the Commissioner, who will make recommendations to the Board of Regents in January 1990.

The first sentence of the task force report summarizes its major findings. It says: "African Americans, Asian Americans, Puerto Ricans/Latinos, and Native Americans have all been the victims of an intellectual and educational oppression that has characterized the culture and institutions of the United States and the European American world for centuries." In the words of the Commissioner, the Task Force report calls for "sweeping changes in what and how we teach." It is not a curriculum; it is a proposal for a new curriculum, new instructional strategies, a new administrative office in the State Education Department to enforce "cultural equity," and changes in teacher education.

While the task force calls for revision of all curricular areas--mathematics, science, music, art, etc.--along multicultural lines, I am going to look only at the social studies because this field was the main focus of the Task Force report.

Today I will be comparing the concept of multiculturalism as it is presented in the Task Force report and as it appears in the California state history/social science curriculum. Please bear in mind that the California curriculum is a fully developed K-12 state curriculum, while the New York proposal is a task force proposal for curriculum revision. Each presents a very different concept of multiculturalism.

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What is multiculturalism? It is a term that means that the schools must recognize that this nation is a society of many different cultures, and that one of our strengths as a nation is our extraordinary diversity. As the world grows ever smaller and ever more interdependent, it becomes clear that America's experience in creating a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-religious society is of international importance. Most wars in the history of the world have derived from the inability of people to tolerate others who are different: who have a different skin color, a different religion, a different language, or a different heritage.

Thus, our ability to forge a successful society, where opportunity is truly open to all, where respect is truly available to all, where diversity is enjoyed and admired, is important both for ourselves and for the world.

The curriculum in American schools must be revised to appropriately reflect the multi-racial, multicultural nature of American society, past and present. During the past generation, textbooks have been revised to incorporate a broader perspective of the American past, but in all too many cases, the additions are merely add-ons, boxes on the side of the main story. The story itself must be told as the forging of a new people, who have learned and are learning to live amicably with others who are different. And that all of us, however we differ, are Americans.

Revisions have been made, and they will continue to be made, because the nature of history is one of constant improvement in what we know about the past and how we characterize it. But revisions must be made without sacrificing historical accuracy.

Let me set a context for discussing these issues. The field of history-social studies is only now beginning to recognize its shortcomings. It should be clear from the dismal results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress survey of 1986 that American children, regardless of their race or ethnicity, have a very poor understanding of American history. Numerous research studies have shown that the most widely used textbooks are ineffective in large part because they are overloaded with facts and pay little attention to the significance of those facts. Furthermore, certain states--and New York and California are among them--allow teachers to become credentialed as social studies teachers even though they have not studied a single course in history during their college years. This is a disgrace. To expect them to teach history in an even more nuanced and complicated fashion when they don't know any history themselves is an expectation that is foreordained for failure.

It is within this context that a number of states have revised their offerings in the social studies to increase historical content and multicultural content. Both California and New York State revised their curriculum in 1987. I was the principal co-writer of the California curriculum and am well familiar with the process in that state.

The New York State curriculum revision involved dozens of teachers, supervisors, and consultants from around the state. I was not one of them. I have been told that the state education department made a conscious effort to improve the multicultural quality of the curriculum. In addition, the final draft of the social studies curriculum was reviewed by John Kahionhes Fadden of the Six Nations Indian Museum; by Dr. Eric Foner of Columbia University; by the late Dr. Hazel Hertzberg of Teachers College; by Dr. Christopher Lasch of the University of Rochester; and by Dr. Ronald Lucchino of Syracuse University.

I am not here to defend the New York State social studies syllabi. Yet I must point out that these syllabi are in no way racist or biased. None of them contains a single statement that could be construed as offensive to any racial or ethnic group.

The problem with them, for me, is quite different. Reading the course syllabi for the social studies in grades 7, 8, and 11 persuades me that American history in the schools of New York State is presented as a boring parade of facts and trends. What is missing? There is very little reference to people. Instead, impersonal forces drive events, trends come and go, changes occur. History happens, but individuals don't count; no one seems to be exuberant or angry; no one has strong feelings. In this version of history, people are merely a footnote.

The problem of the social studies in this state goes far beyond the issue of multiculturalism. As presently organized and presented in these syllabi, the social studies must be a turnoff for many students, whatever their race or ethnicity. They pile on long lists of disconnected facts, abstract concepts, and generic skills; they do not give the reader the feeling that anyone might enjoy this field.

The global studies syllabi for grades 9 and 10 are not racist or culturally biased. These two years include eight units of study, covering the history, geography, culture, society, and economics of the world's major regions. Equal time is given to Africa, Latin America, and Western Europe, as well as four other major world regions. The curriculum might well be faulted for minimizing the influence of Western Europe on the world during the past 500 years. It certainly should be faulted for being overloaded with more facts and concepts than youngsters of this age can reasonably be expected to learn.

From my work in California, I know how difficult it is to mediate among all the conflicting claims of different disciplines, different interest groups, and different camps of teachers and scholars. But it can be done.

Aware that California children were not learning much history, and concerned that the social studies had become an amorphous field without any focus or identity, the State Superintendent of Instruction Bill Honig began a process of curriculum revision in 1985. At the same time, he launched similar curricular revisions in mathematics, science, and reading.

The California history-social science curriculum was developed over a two-year period by a framework committee made up of social studies teachers and historians; it also included people knowledgeable about specific disciplines, like geography and economics.

The framework committee agreed that the new curriculum should center around the study of history. It also agreed that the curriculum must incorporate the historical experiences of all minorities and must educate all children about the culture they live in and about the world at large.

At the same time that they must teach the history of the country and the history of the world, social studies educators have two other vital responsibilities:

1. They must teach the principles and practices of citizenship in a democracy, so that all of us and all of our children are knowledgeable enough to participate in our political, social, and cultural institutions. Furthermore, they must teach the ethical behaviors, attitudes, and civic values that are necessary for the success of a democratic society.
2. They must reduce prejudice among young people. Some of the most serious problems in New York's schools today are not only between white and black, but between children of different minorities, between Caribbean blacks and American blacks, between Latinos and blacks. Citizens of a democratic society must learn to tolerate and respect differences. They must learn to see each other as human beings, not merely as members of a different group.

Now, to accomplish all of these things through the history/social studies curriculum is difficult. Here is how we tried to do it in California:

First, world history was expanded to three required years, during which there is time to examine the civilizations that developed in Africa, the Near East, China, India, and elsewhere; the civilizations of the Mayas, Incas, and Aztecs, the growth of Western civilization in Europe; and the problems of the 20th century world.

Second, teachers of world history and American history are encouraged to use literature and art of diverse cultures--myths, legends, religious literature, poems, novels, biographies, and so on.

Third, the curriculum recognizes explicitly the central role of blacks in reshaping American political institutions. Major units are devoted to slavery in American history; to the abolition movement; to the post-Civil War amendments, and to the way they were undermined by racist political actions and replaced by Jim Crow laws, peonage and segregation; and to the civil rights movement of the 20th century.

Fourth, wherever historically appropriate, the curriculum recognizes the importance of ethnic groups in the building of the nation. A good deal of attention is paid to the Hispanic roots of the Southwest, as well as to Asian and Chicano immigration to California. And the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II is confronted and honestly treated as a violation of basic human rights.

Fifth, great emphasis is placed in every grade on teaching civic values, democratic behaviors, and human rights. Children are encouraged by word and deed to respect themselves and to respect others; to admire those cultures that respect human dignity and to criticize those that do not. They learn to take a critical view of societies that enslave people, that treat women as beasts of burden, that deny basic human rights like freedom of religion and freedom of press and speech.

Sixth, and particularly important for this discussion, the curriculum framework has a strand called "National Identity." This is described as follows:

"Students must: *Recognize that American society is now and always has been pluralistic and multicultural.* From the first encounter between indigenous peoples and exploring Europeans, the inhabitants of the North American continent have represented a variety of races, religions, languages, and ethnic and cultural groups. With the passage of time, the United States has grown increasingly diverse in its social and cultural composition. Yet, even as our people have become increasingly diverse, there is broad recognition that we are one people. Whatever our origins, we are all Americans."

This strand concludes with, "*Realize that true patriotism celebrates the moral force of the American idea as a nation that unites as one people the descendants of many cultures, races, religions, and ethnic groups.*"

I offer the California approach to multiculturalism as one way to reconcile the conflicting commands of our national motto, "E Pluribus Unum." Out of many, one. In the past, many people thought that the slogan meant that everyone must be thrown into the

melting pot, boiled vigorously, and cooked into an assimilated new breed, devoid of any attachments to any group.

We have long known that melting pot assimilation does not work. People do retain ethnic, racial, religious and cultural ties. They continue to have group memories and group loyalties that persist from generation to generation. Here in New York City, the home of ethnic neighborhoods, ethnic foods, ethnic parades, and ethnic celebration, we don't need to be reminded that ethnicity is an enduring and a valued part of American life.

The problem, of course, is how to redefine "E Pluribus Unum" so that we can retain the values of pluralism and still remain one society, one people.

Pluralism is a positive value, but it is also important that we preserve a sense of an American community--a society and a culture to which we all belong. If there is no overall community, if all we have is a group of racial and ethnic cultures, then we have no means to mobilize public opinion on behalf of people who are not a member of their group. We have, for example, no reason to support public education. Public education is paid for by tax dollars to educate all children for their own good and for the good of the larger community. If there is no larger community, then each group will want to teach its own children and public education ceases to exist.

How does the task force report, "A Curriculum of Inclusion" deal with this problem of balance between the competing claims of the one and the many?

I don't think that this proposal attempts to balance the one and the many at all. It is, at bottom, a call not for inclusion but for a radical rewriting of American history (and every other subject) which disparages any common elements in our history, society and culture.

First, it seems important to point out that the sweeping condemnation of the social studies materials by the Task Force is overstated. In reviewing these curricular materials, I was time and again impressed--particularly in the social studies curricula of the early grades--with the very great and careful attention devoted to multiculturalism. The teacher guides for these grades repeatedly direct teachers to books and stories and audiovisuals about African, Asian, Latino, Native American and other racial and ethnic groups. I assumed that the consultants directed so much criticism at the body-count in the illustrations because the multicultural content of the curriculum in these grades is actually quite strong. And as I mentioned before, the global studies curricula is fair and comprehensive.

I agree with the consultants that visuals produced by the State Education Department should always portray cultural diversity; the examples that they identified which failed to do so should be changed. In terms of content, the only example of cultural insensitivity in all of these curricular guides was identified by the Latino consultant, the reference to the Mexican War of the 1840s ("sometimes one country's good intentions are not seen as good by another country"). Rather than this erroneous statement, this would have been an appropriate place to introduce criticism of that war by young Congressman Abraham Lincoln, by Frederick Douglass, and by Senator Thomas Corwin (whose speech denouncing the war has been called the most courageous speech ever delivered in the U.S. Senate).

Second, the treatment of "cultures" in the report is very troublesome. The task force and its consultants tell us that they have chosen to view the curriculum through the eyes of the following cultures: African American, Asian American, Native American, and Latino/Puerto Rican.

However, the consultants remind us that each of these labels in fact represents many cultures. There are 12 Native American tribes in New York State, we are told, and some 300 tribes in the United States; each has its own distinctive culture, and many have a distinctive language. The Latino/Puerto Rican label covers a large number of quite different cultures, including Mexican-Americans, Cuban-Americans, and a variety of other distinctive groups from Central and South America. The Asian American consultant points out that there are numerous distinctive Asian cultures among Asian-Americans, many with quite different languages and historical experiences. And, of course, African Americans include a disparate variety of groups with distinctive historical experiences.

But the report chooses to treat each of these labels as though they truly represent a single group or culture, which they do not.

In the same stereotypical way, the report describes "European Americans" in ways that are culturally inappropriate, indeed in ways that are offensive, insensitive and biased. All people with a white skin color are referred to as Europeans or "Anglo-Saxons." According to the report, Jews and Germans, Irish and Russians, French and Italians, Bulgarians and Spanish, are all members of the same group, all "Anglo-Saxons."

The report treats issues of culture and ethnicity and religion treated in so superficial, so erroneous and so contemptuous a fashion that it damages the task force's credibility.

If New York State intends to take ethnicity and culture seriously, then it must note that the Harvard Encyclopaedia of American Ethnic Groups includes more than 150 separate entries, not including the 300 Native American tribes. A truly multicultural curriculum would take account of those 150 groups, a truly distinctive feature of American life and society, and not throw them into five separate but equal melting pots, as this report does. This does not mean that each must be the subject of study, but that the truly diverse, multi-faceted nature of ethnicity in America must be recognized.

Third, the tone of the report is both anti-white and anti-western. It pleads for respect among all cultures, yet treats western culture with contempt, finding nothing in western history and white people but racism, greed, egoism, and intolerance. There are many terrible chapters in western history--one thinks not only of slavery, but of the Holocaust, the Inquisition, and the Gulag, to name just a few--yet western Europe was also responsible for the rationalism and humanism of the Enlightenment and the democratic political tradition. The very concept of ethnocentrism is the product of western anthropology. Whatever one's political ideology, it is difficult to disregard the influence of western thought.

One cannot read Martin Luther King, Jr.'s writings without realizing how deeply he was influenced by western culture. He alludes repeatedly to such seminal thinkers as Buber, Tillich, Niebuhr, and Spinoza. He was influenced by Gandhi, who in turn was influenced by Henry David Thoreau and Leo Tolstoy. Dr. King was of African descent, but he was both a product of western civilization and a dynamic force in influencing American and western culture.

A new curriculum cannot be built around a proposal that demeans and caricatures the culture of which it is part, and that disparages everyone who happens to have a white skin.

Fourth, the Task Force report repeatedly asserts that the bias in these curricular materials is responsible for the poor performance of children from racial and ethnic minorities. No evidence is provided for this sweeping assertion. If this is true, why do

Asian American children outperform every other group in the population, including white children? Certainly, Asian American figures are virtually absent from textbooks in American history. Yet every year, Asian American children win a disproportionate share of awards in every academic arena. Clearly, their academic performance was not undercut by the teachers' guides, the textbooks or the curricula.

And isn't it rather bizarre to lay so much blame on teachers' guides, as compared to the handicapping consequences of poverty, drugs, crime, poor nutrition, inadequate health care, overcrowded classes, family dissolution, decaying school buildings, and homelessness? I wonder why the task force is placing the blame for low achievement on these benign and rather uninspiring teacher guides instead of demanding that the Legislature appropriate more money for those schools where the problems of academic achievement are greatest.

Fifth, the Task Force makes some rather strong predictions about demography that are either wrong or questionable. The report states that people of African, Asian, Latino and Native American descent will "in the not-so-distant future constitute a majority of New York's population." (p. 16) Since these groups are presently 20-25% of the state's population, this is a bold prediction indeed.

Similarly, the Task Force's demographic projection for the workforce in the year 2000 is inaccurate. The report says on p. 2 that "non-whites will make up 29 percent of the new entrants into the labor force between now and the year 2000, twice their current share of the workforce." This statement leads one to believe that the proportion of minorities in the workforce will double in the next 11 years, but this is not true. According to Workforce 2000, the current non-white share of the workforce is 13.1%; in the year 2000, it will be 15.5%.

All minority children should be educated, whether their group is 1% or 20% of the population. But the appeal should be based on what is right, on grounds of justice and equity, not an implicit threat that minorities are about to overwhelm the majority.

Sixth, the report seems to endorse the dubious notion of collective guilt and historical guilt. In effect, all white people today are responsible for slavery and should feel a personal sense of guilt for what other white people did five hundred years ago, one hundred years ago, or last month. This is stereotypical thinking, and is no more valid than blaming all members of a minority group for the misdeeds of the few. Those who commit crimes should be punished for them; people who happen to be of the same race, the same religion, the same ethnicity cannot be treated as guilty for a crime they did not commit.

Seventh, reconstruction of the curriculum--particularly in the area of history--must proceed on the basis of review by scholars who are competent to judge. The history that children learn in school should not be determined by political pressures brought to bear on the State Education Department. In California, pressure was applied by many representatives of ethnic groups, who wanted the textbooks to reflect their view of their history or their view of their age-old enemies. As a curriculum writer, I sat eyeball-to-eyeball with State Board members who told me what they wanted the state curriculum to say. It was only because of the courage of Bill Honig and members of his staff (particularly Francie Alexander) that these insistent pressures were resisted.

New York State has not been immune to political pressure in the past. For example, in the 11th grade syllabus, teachers learn that the two major influences on the U.S. Constitution were: 1) 17th and 18th century Enlightenment thought; and 2) the "Haudenosaunee political system." The latter refers to the Longhouse Indians of New York

State; one of the curriculum guides notes that the department staff met with a Haudenosaunee delegation of 12, including seven chiefs; apparently their presentation was compelling. Whether the influence of the Haudenosaunee on the drafters of the Constitution was decisive I cannot say; but I do believe that New York State is the only state that teaches that it was.

There is a danger, and I have seen it in the curricula of Poland and China and the textbooks of the Soviet Union, and the danger is that of politicized history and Official History. Will truth depend on who is in power? Will our teaching of history be rewritten depending on who won the last election? Will curriculum writers rewrite history to assuage angry pressure groups? Although I participated in what seemed to me to be a successful venture in drafting a state curriculum, I suspect that most such efforts are wide open for abuse, and it may be the exception not the rule when a state curriculum is able to avoid the danger of politicization by interest groups.

What we should be teaching children in history is to examine a variety of interpretations and to learn to ask questions. As the power of the mass media grow ever stronger, we must teach children to resist any kind of official truths and to accept nothing in the textbooks on faith. Instead of Official History, our youngsters should learn how to test evidence and form their own opinion.

Eighth, I want to discuss what the study of history might teach us about the nature of race and its importance as a category.

The Task Force wants to use history and social studies to teach self-esteem to children of minorities. This is a complicated subject indeed. It is perfectly appropriate to find in history many examples of achievement by people of all races and ethnic backgrounds. Doing so enables all children to see that one's skin color or ethnicity is no barrier to success.

On the other hand, history should not be used to teach racial chauvinism or racial superiority. We want children to know that racism and prejudice are evil. Every race has been guilty of terrible crimes against humanity in history (very often against members of their own race).

Whites were guilty of permitting slavery; whites were responsible for the Holocaust and other horrible crimes. Other racial groups have committed comparable crimes. Remember that white slave traders bought African slaves from Arab slave traders, who bought them from African tribes who enslaved their captives during wars. Aztec peoples practiced human sacrifice and slavery. Before World War I, the Turkish government massacred hundreds of thousands of Armenians. In Africa in the late 1960s, a million or more Ibo people were starved to death by the Nigerian government when they tried to create a secessionist Biafran state. In China, the Maoist government killed millions of Chinese people. Japan slaughtered tens of thousands of Chinese during the infamous "Rape of Nanking" in the 1930s. The Khmer Rouge government slaughtered more than a million of its own people in the 1970s.

No race has a corner on virtue. Each child should learn to value himself or herself as a member of the human race. Self-esteem ultimately must derive from one's own hard work and accomplishments, not from pride in one's skin color, which is an inherited attribute rather than an accomplishment.

The Task Force says that the curriculum presents European culture as the master of the house, who invites other cultures to dine at the table. The Task Force wants a round table, like King Arthur's, where everyone is equal.

There is truth in the metaphor. Everyone at the American table must be seen as an equal. Racism, prejudice, and ethnocentrism have no place in our political community. But let's talk about the table. Without the table, these individuals and groups have nothing in common. Without the table, there is no way to talk together.

What is the table? The table is the western democratic political tradition. It is the galaxy of political ideas and values that includes liberty, equality, and justice. It is the complex of democratic practices that require us to respect basic human rights, to listen to dissenters instead of jailing them, to have a multi-party system, a free press, free speech, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, and free trade unions. It is a tradition shaped by the Enlightenment, by James Otis, Thomas Jefferson, Horace Mann, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Samuel Gompers, John Dewey, Jane Addams, A. Phillip Randolph, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Martin Luther King, Jr., Bayard Rustin, and millions of other people of many cultural backgrounds.

If we don't teach these values and practices to our children, then there will be no table. The table is our common political culture, and without it, we will have no political community, no way to appeal to the majority to support public programs for those who are of a different race or ethnicity.

We teach our children about the history of their society for a variety of reasons. We want them to see how it evolved and what it is becoming so that they will be able to understand it, make their way in it, learn its symbols and language, and participate as knowledgeable citizens in the present and the future. All of them will be eligible to vote; all will probably live and work in a variety of contexts, sometimes with people of their own group, but more often with people from a variety of backgrounds.

What we should be teaching our children is that race hatred is wrong, racial chauvinism is wrong, racism is wrong. People are people. Cut us and we bleed. If we lose a child, we cry. The human heart is the same in all of us, regardless of skin color or language.

The job of public education is to teach all of us, whatever our ancestry, what W.H. Auden wrote 50 years ago, as a new world war began: "We must love one another or die."